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LIFESTYLE

TREASURES OF THE ORIENT

Change is brewing in the city of teas and dragons known as Beijing. *The Peak* explores China's grand capital and uncovers its various hedonistic secrets that will have you looking forward to your next visit.

TEXT MAYA MICHAEL IMAGES KSK LAND, NUO HOTEL, SUNRISE KEMPINSKI HOTEL BEIJING, YANQI ISLAND & SHUTTERSTOCK



RISE & SHINE
The resplendent Sunrise Kempinski Hotel stands out amidst its natural surroundings.

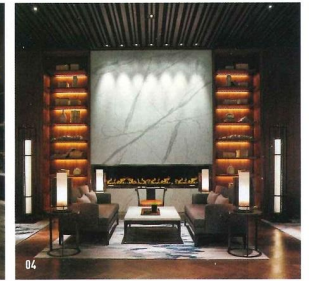


“FOR KEMPINSKI, TRUE LUXURY IS ABOUT PAYING ATTENTION TO THE FINER DETAILS”

Beijing, home of ancient treasures like the Forbidden City and futuristic structures such as the Beijing National Stadium, is a budding metropolis of interesting juxtapositions. In many ways, its rapidly transforming skyline portrays just how fervently this bustling metropolis is embracing the modern world. The same can also be said about China's competitive upmarket hospitality sector, where the need to deliver enriching experiences to entice affluent travellers can, at times, feel like a never-ending race for the finish.

One of the latest luxury hotel brands to take on this tremendous task is the **Nuo Hotel Beijing** that resides in the heart of the bustling capital, next to the world-famous 798 Arts District. As the country's only home-grown five-star hotel brand, this ambitious project between the Beijing Tourism Group and Europe's oldest luxury hotelier, Kempinski Hotels, aims to promote the lifestyle and attitudes of modern China while honouring its cultural heritage.

“This year, Kempinski Hotels will be celebrating its 120th anniversary,” says Michael Henssler, President of Kempinski China. “While that might seem like nothing compared to China's own history, it's still a major statement within the hotel industry. One of the key reasons that Kempinski has been able to thrive



for so long has to do with our passion for crafting tailor-made experiences based on our understanding of the discerning traveller... instead of just sticking with a 'one size fits all' kind of approach. With Nuo Hotel Beijing, our intent is to present an authentic experience that caters specifically to the Chinese market and to transform 'Made in China' into something that we can all be proud of.”

This is immediately evident upon entering the hotel's revolving doors, which links to a grand lobby where guests will be transported into a world of contemporary art. Drawing its inspiration from the country's 5,000 years of history and cultural heritage, this immense space, with sky-high ceilings, displays several interesting features dominated by massive porcelain vases in serene shades of blue and white, and various artworks

by internationally renowned Chinese artist Zeng Fanzhi, who also serves as the hotel's honorary art consultant.

Many other fascinating discoveries also dwell within the hotel's 438 guest rooms and suites that come equipped with luxurious amenities such as massive walk-in closets and freestanding bathtubs, and various charming bric-a-brac that includes quaint personal tea sets in porcelain and bamboo. Inquisitive types who wish to deepen their understanding of the ancient art of brewing Chinese tea can sign up for a memorable tea ceremony at the hotel's charming Yuan Tea House to satisfy their curiosity.

Since the grand official launch of Nuo Hotel Beijing, Kempinski has expanded its portfolio following the acquisition of the former Raffles Beijing Hotel (now known as the

01 GRAND DESIGNS
One can spend hours exploring the impressive grounds of the luxurious Yanqi Hotel.

02 BLUE CALM
The grand lobby of NUO Hotel Beijing is modern Ming living at its best.

03 SLEEK & CHIC
Sit back and relax at the stylish lounge at Sunrise Kempinski Hotel.

04 COZY NOOK
NUO Hotel's graceful lobby offers extraordinary ambience coupled with excellent service.

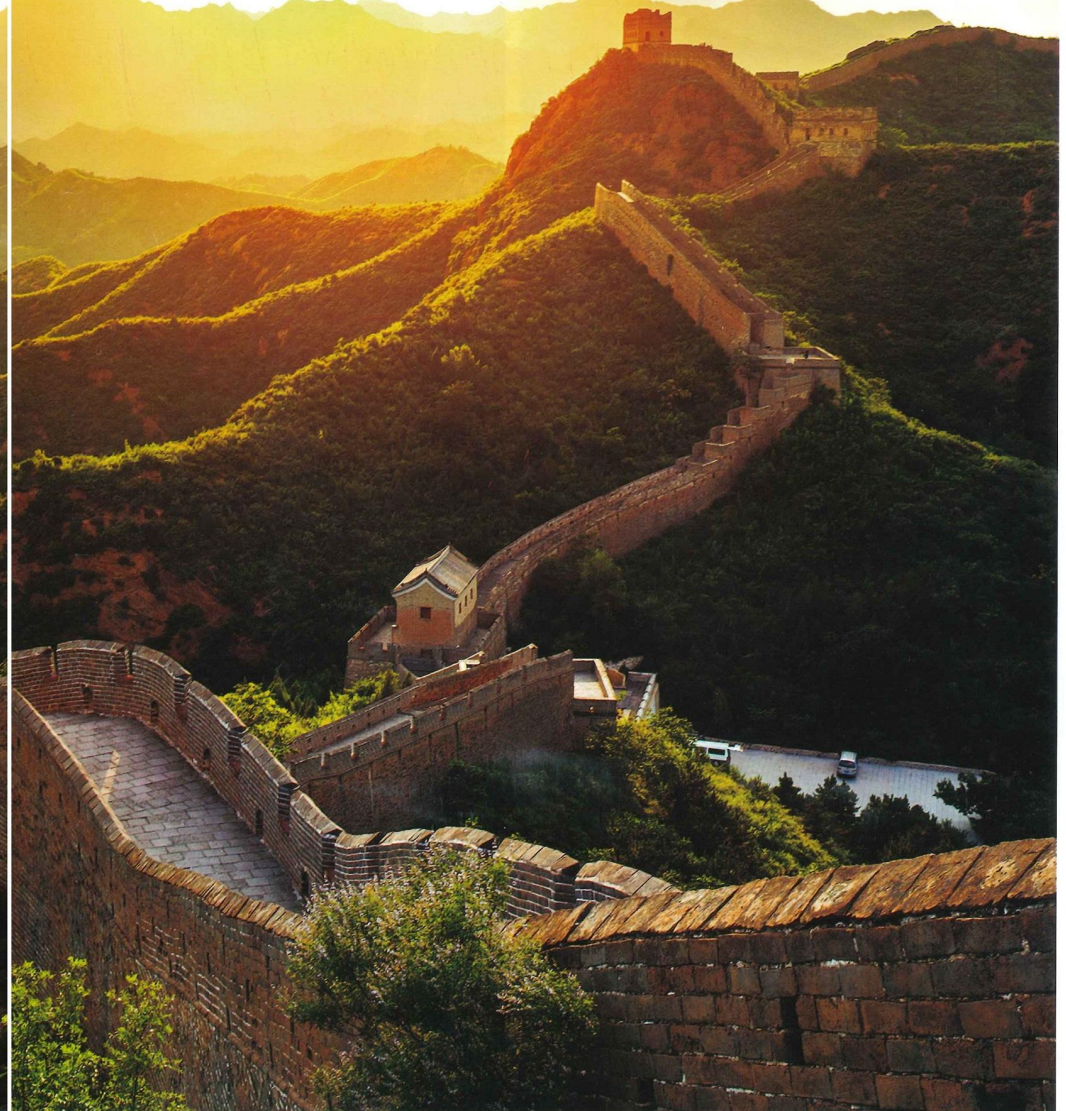
Beijing Hotel Nuo), which is a seven-minute walk from the iconic Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. According to Henssler, plans are underway to expand the brand to Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, as well as other first tier cities such as New York, Paris, London, Rome and Dubai.

"When we first came up with the idea for Nuo Hotels, our partners were hesitant because of the overall perception towards things made in China. But we were confident that this notion would eventually change and we were determined that we would play a role in making that happen. Our main motivation is beyond just expanding our footprint across the globe... it's about crafting personalised experiences while also sharing the Kempinski story," he explains.

And what a story it is. It all began after an ambitious entrepreneur named Berthold Kempinski, who, in 1872, decided to establish a wine tavern in Berlin's Friedrichstrasse – a bold move that would ultimately pay off. As the business began to grow, Kempinski decided to branch out into the real estate business, before roping in his son-in-law, Richard Unger. Upon retirement, Kempinski decided he would transfer the business to Unger under the condition that they would retain the family name and the rest, as they say, is history.

Currently, Kempinski operates 75 five-star hotels across 30 countries with plans to open a branch in Kuala Lumpur as part of 8 Conlay – a mixed development project by KSK Land that is spearheaded by its Managing Director, Joanne Kua. Targeted for completion in 2020, Kua is confident that Kempinski's presence will set a new standard in the all-inclusive luxury segment with its facilities, renowned quality service and location in the heart of the city at Jalan Conlay.

"In the past, luxury in Asia was considered as something that was only tangible. But today's discerning consumers are looking for a more personalised experience. This is also the main reason we decided to go with Kempinski as our service



GREAT ESCAPES
The legendary Great Wall of China is one of history's most impressive feats of architecture.



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05 WELL ROUNDED
The futuristic glass facade of the lakeside hotel was constructed using approximately 10,000 glass panels.

06 AHEAD OF THE CURVE
The iconic 'Moongate Corridor' at NUO Hotel.

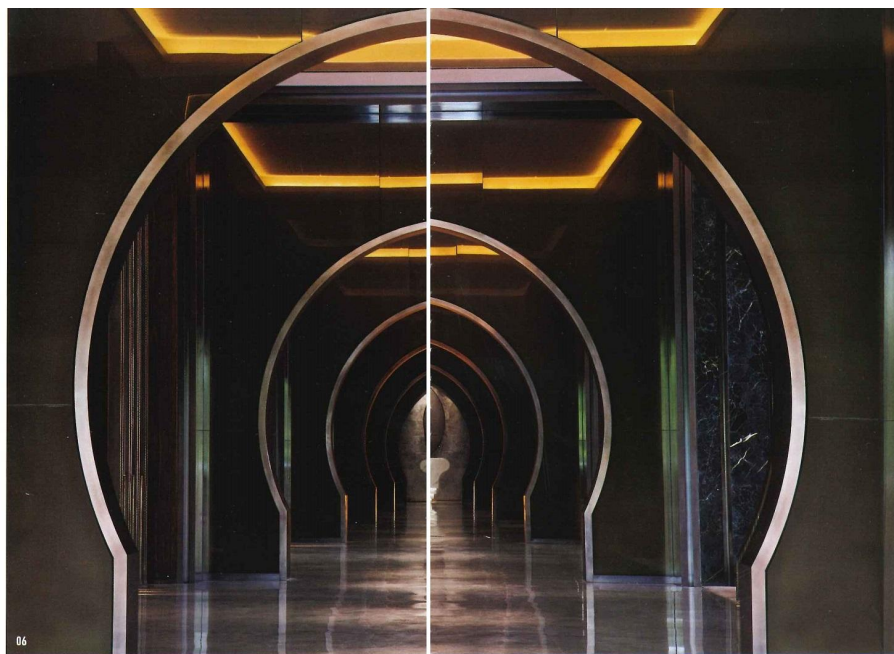
07 LAKESIDE SPLENDOR
The fabulous interiors of the massive Marina Suite at Yanqi Hotel.

08 TEA PARTY
Master the art of preparing Chinese Tea at NUO Hotel's Yuan Tea House.

09 A FINE FEAST
The Magnolia Restaurant at Sunrize Kempinski Hotel is the place to savour authentic Chinese recipes.

partner. For Kempinski, true luxury is about paying attention to the finer details, to craft a bespoke experience and to anticipate the needs of their guests. Only a few global players can confidentially say that they are able to meet these standards," says Kua.

Just north of Beijing's massive city centre lies another chapter of the Kempinski story waiting to be discovered. With 595 guestrooms and suites spread across a sprawling 14 sq km, the **Sunrize Kempinski Hotel, Beijing & Yanqi Island** is the



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hotelier's largest property in China. Constructed from steel and 10,000 glass panels, this futuristic, gleaming orb certainly stands out against the scenic natural backdrop that includes the tranquil waters of the nearby Yanqi Lake and magnificent mountains bordering the horizon.

Designed by the Shanghai Huadu Architect Design Company, many visitors have described the unconventional shape of the Sunrize Kempinski Hotel as akin to the glorious sun peeking over the horizon – a poignant symbol of China's rising prominence. From another angle, the curved structure resembles that of

If it is true luxury that you desire, then a journey to the nearby **Yanqi Island** will prove most rewarding. Located 15 minutes away by car, this private island is home to several architectural marvels such as the ultra-modern Yanqi Hotel. Also managed by Kempinski, the hotel houses a total of 111 guestrooms and suites, each of which have been specifically designed to cater to the needs of well-heeled travellers who yearn for peace and privacy.

As for the main attraction of the island, this would have to be the 12 unique boutique hotels that are scattered throughout the property.



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a plump scallop, which is a popular symbol of fortune in Chinese culture, while the arched entrance overlooking the lake is reminiscent of the mouth of the mystical koi fish that symbolises wealth and success.

Housed inside its glistening curved exterior are 306 guest rooms and suites spread across 21 floors, each offering picturesque views of the surrounding natural beauty. Hawk-eyed observers will also be able to spot the Mutianyu section of the Great Wall of China that was constructed during the reign of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China. This man-made wonder of stone and earth is best visited during the spring and autumn seasons, when the temperatures are just right for indulging in a spirited hike.

Measuring anywhere between 5,000 to 9,000 sq m each, these magnificent mansions were individually designed for housing the leaders of the world's most powerful nations during the 22nd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) convention held at the island's Beijing Yanqi Lake International Conference Centre in November 2014. Fit for any modern-day emperor, this unique collection of elaborate villas is sure to unleash anyone's inner pleasure-seeker. One can spend hours uncovering the various secrets of these decadent dwellings that come complete with massive private rooms, Olympic-sized indoor pools, fully equipped gyms, entertainment rooms and so much more. If this isn't the ideal venue to truly celebrate a life well-lived, we don't know what is. (A)